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[Home](#) [News](#) [Get involved](#) [Safety](#) [Living](#)
[Wage](#) [Behind The Scenes](#) [Issues](#) [Resources](#) [About us](#)

Cambodian Trade Union Leader Arrested



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The Clean Clothes Campaign is deeply concerned for the safety and welfare of union- and worker leaders in Cambodia. On November 18th Sous Chantha, a trade union leader of the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Unions (C.CAWDU) was arrested and charged with drug trafficking. This arrest is believed to be a frameup in order to disturb his union activities. He risks 2 to 5 years in jail.



C.CAWDU organized a nation-wide strike for higher wages last September which led to mass dismissals of union members and dozens of legal cases filed against union leaders. Today, 379 workers from 18 companies are still dismissed from their workplaces. Their families are without income. They cannot pay for food nor for house rent and risk being thrown out of house.

Please take action today and call upon the Cambodian government to immediately and unconditionally release Sous Chantha, and upon the employers and the Garment Manufacturer Association in Cambodia (GMAC) to immediately reinstate all suspended and dismissed workers and their leaders with average back-wages paid and to start good faith negotiations about the workers' benefits proposal at once.

Background:

Framed for joining C.CAWDU

Sous Chantha has been working for the United Apparel Garment (formerly Lotus Garment) factory in Phnom Penh for the last four years. United Apparel Garment is mainly producing for GAP. Sous Chantha has been a

union leader since 2008, representing roughly 1000 members who initially were affiliated with Independent Democratic Union Federation (IDUF). Last November 17 they changed from IDUF and decided to affiliate with C.CAWDU.

On November 18 the necessary paperwork to affiliate with C.CAWDU was thumb-printed by union leaders. A little over 2 hours later after he left from the factory at over 6.00 pm, Sous Chanta was stopped and searched by the military police who claim they discovered packages of illegal pills squeezed in between the seat and the chassis of his motorbike. Since then he has been held in pre-trial detention.

C.CAWDU believes this arrest to be a frame-up in order to disturb his union activities. Sous Chanta risks 2 to 5 years in jail. According to the **Cambodia League for the Protection and Defense of Human Rights** (LICADHO) there are contradictory reports from the police about his arrest and there is insufficient legal basis for this detention.

379 still waiting to be reinstated

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The strike lasted from September 13 until September 16 and received massive support from workers: on the last day alone over 200,000 workers from around 90 factories joined the protest. It was called to an end by union leaders after the Ministry of Social Affairs requested a meeting with union leaders to discuss their demands and workers decided to return to their factories. However, when they arrived for work two days later more nearly 800 union members and worker leaders were dismissed, and **dozens of legal cases filed against union leaders** because of their involvement in the strike.

The actions of the employers are in direct contravention of the Cambodian constitution and labour law. They also violate the International Labour Organisation conventions on Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining. The Cambodia government responded by issuing a sub-degree urging employers to drop the court cases and calling on them to return to the negotiating table. It also stated it would not allow workers to be dismissed. At the beginning of October, the courts issued a warrant ordering employers to reinstate the dismissed and suspended workers within 48 hours. The employers have so far refused to abide by the government or court calls and with a few exceptions have not allowed workers to return to their jobs.

Since the dismissals CCC has been calling on the global buyers from the affected factories to demand that workers are reinstated immediately and unconditionally and that the owners enter into good faith negotiations with the trade unions. Some brands have taken steps towards this, but still over 379 workers from 18 companies are waiting for their reinstatement. CCC continues to pressure key brands to take further action and to call upon the powerful Garment Manufacturer Association in Cambodia (GMAC) to immediately reinstate all suspended and dismissed workers and their leaders with average back-wages paid and to start good faith negotiations about the workers' benefits proposal at once.

Take action now:

Sous Chantha and Cambodian Workers need your help.

Send a letter to the Cambodian authorities and to the Garment Manufacturers Association of Cambodia

Letter to

- His Excellency Sok An, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Council
- His Excellency Cham Prasidh, Senior Minister, Minister of Ministry of Commerce
- His Excellency Vong Sauth, Minister of Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT)
- His Excellency Ith Sam Heng, Minister of Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans & Youth and Rehabilitation (MOSAVY)
- His Excellency Ang Vong Vathana, Minister of Ministry of Justice (MOJ)
- His Excellency Sar Kheng, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Ministry of Interior (MOI)

Your Excellency,

Please allow me to express my concern about Sous Chantha, a trade union leader of the independent union federation C.CAWDU. He was arrested on November 18th and charged with drug trafficking. I believe this to be a frameup in order to disturb his union activities.

I understand that his arrest followed only hours after his union affiliated with C.CAWDU, and that there are contradictory statements from the authorities. I also understand according to the investigation results of Human Rights Organization LICADHO there is no evidence against Sous Chantha.

I therefore call on you to carry out a swift, full and impartial investigation into the charges against trade union leader Sous Chantha, and if no clear evidence is found to provide for his release immediately.

I also call on you to adopt a policy to ensure that frameups against trade union leaders are not used to undermine the freedom of association and right to form or join a union.

I look forward to hearing that this issue is resolved at the earliest opportunity,
Sincerely

And to Mr. Van Souieng, President of GMAC
Garment Manufacturer Association in Cambodia:

Dear Mr. Van Souieng

I am writing in regard to the 379 Cambodian workers who are still waiting for reinstatement more than two months after they were dismissed following the national strike for decent wages in September. A number of trade union leaders are still facing spurious legal charges resulting from their participation in this strike. This is despite from the government of Cambodia issuing a statement opposing the dismissals and a warrant urging these cases to be dropped.

I understand that some of your members have recently reinstated part of the dismissed and suspended workers, but that many others are still refusing to do so. As the organisation representing the garment employers of Cambodia I believe you have a responsibility to ensure that all of your members reinstate these workers immediately and unconditionally, with back pay calculated on average monthly incomes.

I look forward to hearing that this issue is resolved at the earliest opportunity and that freedom of association is respected and supported in Cambodia,

Sincerely,

Filed under: [Cambodia](#) [union](#) [arrest](#)



About CCC

Mission
How We Work
Local CCC's

At a glance

The Issues
FAQ
Get Active
Stay Informed

Living Wage

Why a living wage?
Asia Floor Wage
Sign the Living Wage petition

Contact

Contact Information
For the Press
About this site